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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000540

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS
MCC FOR S GROFF, D NASSIRY, E BURKE AND F REID

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: JVP MAINTAINS PRO-WAR STANCE

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On April 5, the Ambassador met with Somawansa Amarasinghe, chairman of the Marxist, Sinhalese chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), to discuss the prospects for a peaceful solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. The JVP, long critical of U.S. foreign policy, has made public statements that the government is acceding to American interests in agreeing to negotiate with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The JVP also has publicly criticized the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), expressing worry the U.S. might build a base in Sri Lanka.

The Ambassador reiterated to Amarasinghe that the U.S. is a friend to the Sri Lankan government and supports its right to defend itself against terrorism, but nevertheless believes that a military solution is neither desirable nor achievable.

Amarasinghe disagreed and said a military defeat of the LTTE is a necessary prerequisite for any political solution. The Ambassador reassured Amarasinghe that the U.S. has no plans to build a base in Sri Lanka. Amarasinghe believes that the Sri Lankan government should present a copy of the ACSA to parliament; the Ambassador said the GSL should make that decision. Although Post will continue to meet with JVP officials occasionally to exchange views, we do not expect to over-come their deeply held pro-war stance. Rather, we'll focus our efforts on lobbying the governing and major opposition parties to produce and promote a viable devolution proposal that will command enough support to drown out extreme nationalist voices. End summary.

"A MILITARY SOLUTION MUST BE POSSIBLE"

-JVP

¶2. (C) The Ambassador met with Somawansa Amarasinghe, chairman of the Marxist, Sinhalese nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), on April 5, following JVP criticism that the Sri Lankan government is "acceding to U.S. interests" in the peace process. The most recent such remark came on April 3 at a JVP district convention in Colombo, when a parliamentarian cited that as the reason his party is boycotting the All Party Representative Committee (APRC).

The JVP pulled out of the APRC in December 2006, six months after the APRC was formed to draft a negotiated solution to the ethnic conflict. Amarasinghe told the Ambassador that the JVP objects to the APRC process because the APRC is working on a devolution proposal that exceeds the "unitary state" mandate under which President Rajapaksa was elected in November 2005.

¶13. (C) Amarasinghe said, "A military solution must be possible. Terrorism must be defeated- it cannot be reformed.

The LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) has shown that it is not ready for a negotiated settlement." He added that a political solution should be decided "simultaneously" with military efforts. "Security forces are fighting a just war, particularly to liberate the Tamil people," Amarasinghe said, and only after a full military defeat of the LTTE can democratic institutions be restored in the north and east. Since the LTTE will never accept less than a separate state, he posited, it is futile to negotiate with the Tigers.

¶14. (C) The Ambassador said that many analysts assessed that neither side could win a decisive military victory, and in the meantime, civilians suffered from ongoing violence. The U.S. encourages a negotiated settlement that meets the needs of all communities, Sinhalese, Muslims, and Tamils, the Ambassador said. In addition, the international community remains concerned with human rights and humanitarian issues in Sri Lanka. Amrasinghe responded that any domestic conflict gives rise to human rights problems, which he "hopes can be managed" here.

STILL WARY OF ACSA

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¶15. (C) The Ambassador raised the subject of the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), reassuring Amarasinghe that the U.S. has no plans to build a base in Sri Lanka. The ACSA, a standard agreement the U.S. maintains with over 80 countries, is operational rather than strategic, the Ambassador stated. Amarasinghe responded that his party is deeply wary of any U.S. involvement in Sri Lanka and criticized American foreign policy over the last fifty years, citing the Vietnam War, engagement in Latin America, and the Iraq War as examples of the U.S. causing harm.

¶16. (C) The Ambassador said that there were no parallels with the current situation in Sri Lanka, and reiterated that the U.S. continues to be a friend to the Sri Lankan government and supports its right to defend itself against terrorism. Amarasinghe complained that the U.S. does not treat other nations as equals, but conceded that "Internally, the U.S. is the world's most democratic country." He added he would have been happy had he moved to America in his youth before he started his political career.

¶17. (C) Although no press was present for the meeting, on April 6 local papers carried a fairly accurate account of it, focusing primarily on Amarasinghe's comments. The press reported that the JVP is calling on the Sri Lankan government to present the ACSA in parliament.

¶18. (C) COMMENT: The JVP, once a violent paramilitary force, had to give up arms in order to enter the political mainstream. The LTTE, by contrast, maintained its violent methods but still achieved recognition as a negotiating entity in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. It's no surprise that the JVP, typically obstreperous, is maintaining its anti-LTTE, pro-war stance. There is little chance the JVP will re-engage with the APRC process or moderate its position. It is likely that even if the APRC manages to produce a viable devolution proposal that can mitigate the conflict, the JVP will run a national campaign to defeat the required constitutional revision to implement the solution. With a legal requirement that a two-thirds majority in

parliament and a simple majority in a national referendum approve amendments to the constitution, the JVP will try to act as spoilers to undermine the peace process. We will continue to meet with JVP officials occasionally to exchange views, but do not expect to overcome their intransigence. Rather, we will focus our efforts on persuading the governing Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and opposition United National Party (UNP) to produce a viable proposal and actively promote it to the public. The support of these two parties and moderate Muslim parties would be sufficient to overcome extremist voices of the JVP and others.

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